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COMMANDS FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICERS
AND DEFENSE JOURNALISTS HAIL U.S. TRAINING AT WORKSHOP

11. Summary. The Military Public Affairs Workshop organized by the Public Affairs Section of the Embassy for the public relations officers of the Nigerian armed forces and for defense journalists succeeded beyond all expectations. Director of the American Forces Information Service Cliff Bernath and USAF LtCol Patrick Barnes of EUCOM Public Affairs provided five days of training on the full range of public affairs activities and issues that relate to defense and the U.S. armed forces. Members of two distrustful Nigerian professional communities) the military and journalists -- worked together during class exercises, and each topic on the schedule allowed for full exchanges that helped constructively communicate their different points of view. There were two concrete results of the sessions. The Nigerian PR officers and the journalists, with Bernath as facilitator, hammered out framework guidelines for their professional relationships. The workshop's final session addressed public affairs planning for Operation Focus Relief Phase III, with the participants brainstorming through audiences, events, and messages. The workshop gained the Embassy dozens of new contacts in the two professional groups, and the relationships and rapport developed during the workshop should smooth public affairs planning and execution for OFR Phase III, now set to begin in September. The public relations officers and the journalists gave this first professional training extravagant praise, and they ardently requested continued U.S. help to enhance and professionalize their role in Nigeria's new civil-military relations. This is a GPRA report. End Summary.

12. Key topics in this cable (see paragraphs below):

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13. "Effective Military Public Affairs in a Democracy" was the theme of a workshop organized in Abuja by the Public Affairs Section of the American Embassy. Working with the Director of Defense Information in Defense Headquarters, Colonel G. A. Adewale, the Nigerian attendees included the Director and his principal assistants, the senior (civilian) information officer on the Minister of Defence's personal staff, the public relations chiefs of each of the three services, and officers and senior NCO's from a number of service commands. At the request of the DDI, the defense journalists accredited to the Ministry of Defense were invited as participants, along with public affairs representatives of the "paramilitary" forces) the police and the customs service.

14. The Office of International Information Affairs lined up two extraordinarily qualified resource persons for the workshop) Director of the American Forces Information Service (and former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs) Cliff Bernath, and USAF Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Barnes from the EUCOM public affairs office.

15. The workshop was formally opened by Minister of Defence T.Y.Danjuma and by Ambassador Jeter. Also present was Vice Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi, Chief of Defense Staff.

16. The theme of the Minister's remarks was the necessity for transparency, openness and accountability. "Public officials

are stewards who are accountable to the people," he said. "The public has a right to know what government and public officials are doing, because whatever they are doing is supposed to be for the people. They have a right to ask questions because they are stakeholders in the affairs of the nation."

17. "The military is a unique national institution with its own peculiar norms and practices," the Minister continued. Because it is "preoccupied with the security of the nation," it tends to be secretive. This results in "mistrust and misunderstanding in civil-military relations." Also, "the misadventure of the military getting involved in politics and governance has done serious damage to the image and credibility of the armed forces." Now "we must make conscious and sustained efforts to communicate openly with the public."

18. The Minister told the participants that public relations professionals in the Ministry of Defense and the services must be "professional in dealing with our public," and must create "channels for the exchange of ideas and information."

19. In closing, the Minister reflected that "over the years I have come to appreciate the role and orientation of the press in civil-military relations. The news media would always report an event whether it gets the information from official sources or not. The military wants to defend the nation, but the media wants to watch and report the defenders so as to make them accountable. There is often conflict in these roles. We can avoid unnecessary tension and conflicts by appreciating the complimentary nature of these roles." He concluded by urging "the military and the media to be steadfast and transparent in their relationship for greater benefit of our society."

10. This strong endorsement of openness and transparency by the Minister was greeted by the assembled public relations officers and journalists with enthusiasm. Many told us during the workshop that they hoped Danjuma would repeat the message for their commanders, who have a strong aversion to dealing with the media.

11. Ambassador Jeter in his opening remarks noted that the armed forces now "serve an elected government, respond to legislative oversight, face the media, and are accountable to the Nigerian people." The democratic transition, he said, "will make this country greater, more prosperous, and more stable in the future. The Nigerian armed forces will win the respect of the Nigerian people as corruption ends, as the standards of training and professionalism increase, as leadership takes on a democratic spirit, as your bases and installations are recognized as 'good neighbors' in the community they serve, and as people see soldiers, sailors, and airmen engaged in useful tasks. Internationally, your troops are a vital force for peace and stability in Africa. Nigerians should know it; Africa should know it; and the world should know it."

12. The Ambassador continued, however, that "for too many journalists, there is a reflexive distrust of the armed forces. For too many of Nigeria's leaders, civilian as well as military, their press policy can be summed up as, 'we wish the media would go away.' The Ambassador cautioned against "the military habit that decisions are not to be questioned," "misusing 'official secrets' as a reason not to reveal shortcomings or embarrassing facts," a "reluctance to admit that the armed forces were, during the period of military rule, as devastated and hollowed out as other institutions," and a reluctance to "face the reality that there was wholesale corruption and tolerance of serious human rights violations, and marked deviations from the rule of law in the past." "building a bridge of trust between the armed forces and the media is one more task for the democratic transition."

13. The workshop schedule included sessions on:

- Internal Information Programs
- Community Relations
- Overview of Public Affairs Events -- Civic Tours, Open Houses, etc.
- Planning for Public Affairs Events
- Military-Media Relations During Military Operations
- Media Pools/Embedded Media
- Preparing Public Affairs Guidance for Military Operations
- Working with the Media: Two Perspectives
- Media Abilities: Press Conferences, TV Interviews, print interviews, speeches followed by Q&A, the "ambush"

-- Crisis Public Affairs
-- Practical Exercises: Exercise press briefings
-- Public Affairs Products
-- Operation Focus Relief
-- Discussion and Planning, Operation Focus Relief Phase III

¶14. In the early sessions of the workshop, the accumulated distrust and nursed grudges between the two Nigerian groups (military and media) resulted in charges and shouting matches. Bernath skillfully cooled this conflict with a special session on self-image and definitions of patriotism that clarified much of the gap. Heads nodded as participants saw that the military officers regarded themselves as patriotic because of their dedication to the country, while the journalists defined patriotism as serving the public with needed information.

¶15. Wednesday afternoon of the workshop was devoted to preparing for press conferences. The Public Affairs Section of the Embassy helped develop scenarios -) an explosion of fuel tanks on an installation, a C-130 crash, and a conflict between local citizens and drunken soldiers. Three teams of participants, each team with military public relations officers and journalists, worked together to prepare a briefer to meet the press, while Bernath, Barnes, and Bishop took the roles of aggressive journalists. This exercise joined the two sides with positive results for the remainder of the seminar.

¶16. On Thursday afternoon, Bernath led a session that asked the participants to consider professional guidelines for the interaction between the armed forces public affairs officers and the media. All present agreed on these principles:

For the media:

(1) Media reporting will be objective, factual, balanced, and fair. A professional reporter will subjugate tribalism, politics, and religion to these goals.

(2) A professional journalist must be trained and informed about military subjects.

(3) Media should be willing to share the risks of military operations after training.

(4) The media will be sensitive to the legitimate security needs of the military.

For the military:

(1) The military will provide complete, timely, accurate, and factual information subject to national security interests.

(2) The military will ensure accessibility to media to adequately inform the Nigerian public of military activities.

(3) The military should understand the needs of the media and assist them in meeting those needs.

(4) The military will provide reasonable assistance to the media to cover military related activities and events.

Despite the numerous qualifiers, the two groups were extremely satisfied by the professional airing of their discontents and with these proposed guidelines.

¶17. On Friday morning, Embassy Defense Attaché Colonel Victor Nelson gave a comprehensive and frank briefing of Operation Focus Relief, and he deftly answered questions. The Embassy CPAO then led the group through a brainstorming session focused on preparations for OFR Phase III, due to begin in September.

¶18. The first part of the 90 minute session addressed the question of audiences -) political leaders, academics, youth, the business community, students, religious leaders, labor, NGOs, community associations, traditional rulers, and "average Nigerians" among them. The military participants

also saw a need to use internal information channels to more widely inform service members (in non-participating units) about OFR.

¶19. The second part addressed possible events that could serve as news hooks for media messages. These included the arrival of U.S. soldiers, visits to exercise sites, weapons displays, marksmanship training, competitions, an "open day," local leader visits, the final ceremony, and the sendoff of troops to Sierra Leone. The participants urged that public affairs for OFR Phase III should begin at least two weeks ahead of the arrival of American units, and they said that Nigerian briefers would have the most credibility with Nigerian audiences.

¶20. The third part addressed messages, and there was agreement on four major thematic clusters:

(A) **Mutuality:** The U.S. and Nigeria are working together in concert and in harmony, for mutual benefits. For Nigeria, the benefits include new and better equipment for units, enhanced training, and better logistics.

(B) **Explaining Nigeria's National Interests:** Nigerian troops play an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the subregion. Nigeria, Africa, and the world benefit when Nigeria assumes a leadership role.

(C) **Re-professionalization:** OFR makes an important contribution to the re-professionalization of Nigeria's armed forces, whose professional military qualities seriously eroded during the period of military rule. It also contributes to combat readiness, and it demonstrates its re-focus on military, not political, tasks.

(D) **The democracy dividend:** The role of the armed forces is changing for the better. It is now firmly committed to the constitution, and to a new spirit of military subordination to the civilian government. This is a vital part of the nation's focus on good governance. The people benefit from the serious commitment of the armed forces to civilian democratic rule.

¶21. GPRA Data: Date: 25-29 June 2001. FY-2001, Quarter 3. Audience: 30 armed forces and Ministry of Defense public relations specialists including the Director of Defense Information and the public relations chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. 15 defense journalists. Results: "Excellent" is an understatement.

Jeter